Historical Review of the Carolina Parakeet in the Carolinas

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ABSTRACT. — Parrots or parakeets appear in many lists of Carolina birds recorded by such early voyagers, explorers and promoters as Thomas Hariot (1588), William Hilton (1664), Thomas Ashe (1682), Samuel Wilson (1682), John Lawson (1709), Mark Catesby (1731) and others. These references, when authentic, can be safely assigned to the now extinct Carolina parakeet, *Conuropsis carolinensis*. The species was so named by Linnaeus (1758) from a drawing of a specimen taken in South Carolina by Catesby. Despite association of the region with the bird's name, a long history constitutes the bulk of evidence on the species in the Carolinas. There are no specimens, exceedingly few precise claims by ornithologists, and no specific references to eggs, migratory movements or young. Little can be found to validate North Carolina's claim to parakeets after about 1770 (William Bartram). For South Carolina, matters are more complex: widely spaced but fairly persistent records bring the bird's history there down to about the end of the Civil War, with a final, no doubt storm-tossed, bird accidentally occurring about 1885. There was a flurry of alleged sightings in the decade of the 1930s, but the birds either disappeared without documentation or were not there in the first place.

INTRODUCTION

In an account of the Carolina parakeet, *Conuropsis carolinensis* (Linnaeus), history and biology must mix, for the species is extinct. That notably handsome bird, so often remarked by early travelers, thus joins the passenger pigeon and other vanished species in a group about which we (as a civilization) know pretty much all that we shall know. Veteran ornithologists know about it, of course, and sometimes allege a good many things that a careful historian of the species learns are not true. But, ask a concerned American citizen to name ten exterminated species of animals and the Carolina parakeet will probably not be among them.

Except for its name, the parrot of Carolina was not uniquely associated with the Carolinas. It was widely, if somewhat erratically, distributed in the eastern United States, being found from Florida to Texas and well up the Arkansas, Missouri, Ohio and Mississippi river valleys. This report, emphasizing evidence on distribution in North and South

Carolina, extends my geographical history of the parakeet (McKinley 1960, 1964, 1965, 1976, 1977a, b, c, 1978a, b, c). Some quotations from the literature may seem unnecessarily long, but they impart to modern readers the enormous impact made by the new land upon early observers, and leave to critical minds the final evaluation of these pioneer statements.

Early and late, there is chaff among the grain. Since "Carolina" already has an open-ended quality about it, for example, it may be well to sandwich in here a quaint and innocent early allusion to the parakeet in the New World, although largely extrapolated from the cartographic. Except for Hariot's Roanoke Island report for North Carolina, it is also the earliest attribution of the species to the area of Carolina. Sanson d'Abbeville, writing about 1653, said nothing about parakeets in Florida or Virginia, but in regard to a vague region in between that he called (in translation) "the Appalachians," he wrote: "In this region there are parrots, pigeons, turtle doves, eagles, ducks, magpies, sparrows and many other types of birds." A map accompanying his account shows an inland area denominated "Apalatchy Monts" which runs more or less east-west between a tremendously northerly-swollen Florida and a Virginia that is sort of hunched up against the Atlantic Ocean (1959:48).

PARAKEETS IN NORTH CAROLINA: THE REPORTS

For a state with few substantial records of the parakeet, North Carolina has a history of the species that is resplendent in its antiquity. Thomas Hariot (1588) reported that the ill-starred little colony on Roanoke Island had parrots. In what was certainly America's first example of science for science's sake, he wrote: "There are also Parats, Faulcons & Marlin haukes, which although with us they bee not used for meate, yet for other causes I thought good to mention" (in Quinn 1955:359). Unfortunately, John White, dedicated planter of the colony (and grandfather of Virginia Dare, born there), did not figure the parakeet among the lovely illustrations of natural history subjects that he left to a careless posterity (Hulton 1965).

Thus, Dare County has an early claim to parakeets. The next report affirmed that the species was found in southeastern parts of the state. Captain William Hilton of the West Indian island of Barbados carefully surveyed the coast of the Carolinas in autumn 1663. His explorations of Cape Fear River may have taken him to the vicinity of Fayetteville, Cumberland County, with noteworthy descriptive results. In early November, he described the return down-river toward the sea (1664): "So we returned . . . viewing the Land on both sides the River, and found as good tracts of land, dry, well wooded, pleasant and delightful as we have seen any where

in the world, with great burthen of Grasse on it, and in some places very high, the woods stor'd with abundance of Deer and Turkies every where; we never going on shoar, but saw of each also Partridges great store, Cranes abundance, Conies, which we saw in several places; we heard several Wolves howling in the woods, and saw where they had torn a Deer in pieces. Also in the River we saw great store of Ducks, Teile, Widgeon, and in the woods great flocks of Parrakeeto's; the Timber that the woods afford for the most part consisting of Oaks of four or five sorts, all differing in leaves, but all bearing Akorns very good." To certify that the expedition was not bent entirely upon esthetic and scientific ends, he enumerated the game taken: "In that time as our business called us up and down the River and Branches . . . we kill'd of wild-fowl, four Swans, ten Geese, twenty nine Cranes, ten Turkies, forty Duck and Mallard, three dozen of Parrakeeto's, and six or seven dozen of other small Fowls, as Curlues and Plovers, etc." (Salley 1911:46, 53). The decimation of a continent was underway.

But, such early writers served their own days only, if any at all, and seem to have been soon forgotten. More seminal, however, was the work of John Lawson, loyal adopted son of North Carolina. I think it probably significant that he left no evidence of having seen parakeets in the arduous journey from Charleston, South Carolina, to Pamlico Sound, North Carolina, in the period of late 1700 to late February 1701. That trip took his party up the Santee River and its tributary, the Wateree, to the vicinity of Union County, North Carolina. From there they went northward deep into central parts of the latter state, thence eastward to coastal "Pamptico-cough" (Pamlico), a distance of some 550 miles (see Lefler's comments, Lawson 1967).

Lawson's 1709 account of the aboriginal and natural history of the colony of North Carolina has extensive accounts of many kinds of animals and plants, including parakeets. It is full of information — and misinformation — that must have cost him much conversation and correspondence. "Parrakeetos are of a green Colour, and Orange-Colour'd half way their Head," he wrote in part. "Of these and the Allegators, there is found none to the Northward of this Province" (1967:146-147).

Colonel William Byrd of Westover, ever in search of an outlet for his restless energies (and of a source of income) had something to say about parakeets in North Carolina. He had little use for the scurvy inhabitants of that state, but mentioned as an extenuating circumstance in their failure to plant orchards that "paraqueets" frequently raided fruit trees in autumn (1929:77-78). Or so he said. I suspect the passage was put in for literary effect; his secret diary, from which he later wrote up the public account, does not mention the parakeets at all (*op. cit.*).

When Benjamin Franklin's printing partner, Hugh Meredith, grew tired of the bonds of city life, he dissolved the partnership (July 1730) and apparently went to live among Welch kinsmen that summer and fall near Cape Fear in Brunswick and New Hanover counties. He spent the winter at the mouth of Black River, South Carolina, "near 100 miles West of *Brunswick*." His letters to Franklin describing Cape Fear, published in April and May 1731, were presumably written that winter or early spring and, of course, refer to the previous summer. The Cape Fear region, Meredith reported, had no chestnut, but other Pennsylvania trees were present, plus "Cypress, Laurel, Bay red and yellow, Live Oak and Swamp Oak, all Evergreen except Cypress; with several Sorts whose Names I know not. Pheasants and Heath-hens here are none, but all other Fowl common with you are. Parraquets in Summer, and greater Plenty of Turkeys than ever I saw in Pennsylvania. Here are Foxes, Wolves, Wildcats, Possums, Raccoons, and Panthers always, and Bears sometimes in great plenty; also plenty of Deer, but Beavers here are none, nor any Ground-Squirrels, tho' plenty of Gray and Flying Squirrels; Alligators are very numerous here but not very mischievous; however, on their Account Swimming is less practis'd here than in the Northern Provinces" (1922:26-27). It is unfortunately not clear whether Meredith meant to say that parakeets were absent in winter. If we infer this, it must be realized that it would have been hearsay information in his case.

John Brickell, who practiced medicine in Edenton for many years, took part of his material straight from Lawson and added bits of his own. Whether to trust him at all is a question at times. For example, he observed in 1737, in regard to what he called "Black small-Crows" (by which he apparently meant blackbirds of some sort that were enemies of corn), that they "Build their Nest in hollow Trees as the *Parakeetoes* do" (1911:179, 181). This is something that our native blackbirds do not do and which is largely a matter of popular conviction with the parakeet, for nobody ever got around to observing it conclusively. (A source of additional Brickell claims is the Virginia traveler, the Rev. John Clayton, as shown by Simpson and Simpson [1977], although Clayton contributed nothing on the parakeet. The Simpsons reproduce [page 4] a plate that appeared in the 1737 edition of Brickell where a "Parekeetoe" is among the fairly recognizable denizens of Carolina.)

Aside from William Bartram's rather circumstantial contribution of 1791, the story of the parakeet in North Carolina very nearly ends with Lawson and Brickell. When Bartram wrote that the "parrot of Carolina, or Parrakeet" was among "natives of Carolina and Florida, where they breed and continue the year round," North Carolina, although not expressly said, was probably meant. He had spent a good deal of the time

from 1761 to 1765 and 1770 to 1772 at the plantation of his uncle William who lived near present-day Council, Bladen County, in the Cape Fear River country. He wondered that parakeets did not appear in his native Pennsylvania, since they could, he thought, easily fly from North Carolina, "where they are very numerous" (1958:182, 190-191).

In a search of literature lasting nearly 20 years I have found no records of parakeets in the inland central and western three-quarters of North Carolina. Negative reports are never of much value singly, although I have cited Lawson's account above. I am also impressed by such a diary as that of Lieutenant Reeves, an intelligent Revolutionary War soldier of the Pennsylvania Line (1897). He crossed the entire central North Carolina region from north to south in the spring of 1782, alert to all natural phenomena, but saw no parakeets until he was within South Carolina.

NORTH CAROLINA: A CRITIQUE OF RETROSPECTS

Considering enormous geographic differences between North and South Carolina, it is unfortunate that even ornithologists have so often lumped them as "the Carolinas." It is certainly doubtful if a statement that, "They apparently were common in the Carolinas up to 1850, or perhaps 1860, but must have disappeared from there soon after that" (Bent 1940:3) ought to stand as any sort of North Carolina record. H. H. Brimley wrote that the Austro-riparian or Louisianian Life Zone, characterized by the alligator, marsh rabbit, big eared bat and chuck-will's-widow, "formerly . . . received added brilliance in North Carolina by the presence of the gaudy and noisy Carolina Parroquet," but he offered no significant evidence of its occurrence (1896:66). C. S. Brimley had been asked by old people "what was the bird that used to roam over the state before the Civil War and eat cocklebur," but this is not satisfactory proof of its existence or time of disappearance (MS. note, N. C. State Museum).

The first state-wide bird list described the species as among those gone from North Carolina due to "changes in their environment," an instance of misplaced precision if there ever was one. No doubt optimistically, it was thought that the species might still be looked for as an accidental visitor in southeastern parts of the state (Atkinson 1887:50, 65).

Being totally unhelpful, both Hasbrouck (1891:374) and Smithwick (1897:212) cited Catesby as the only previous authority for the parakeet in North Carolina, despite the fact that Catesby did not refer to that state (Wayne 1917:3). Pearson et al. also mentioned "Catesby's record in 1731" (1919:184), adding to its geographic ambiguity the fact that the date was the rather belated year of publication, not the time when he

would have seen them there anyway. They later added William Byrd's so-called record (1942:192). They chose to ignore, no doubt wisely, a manuscript note dated 10 January 1925 that C. S. Brimley had filed in the State Museum: "Mr. John Handy Ford of Wilmington told Mr. J. C. Crawford recently that he took the eggs of this species some ten years ago in the swamps near Wilmington."

THE PARAKEET IN SOUTH CAROLINA: EARLY YEARS

References that call the parakeet a "formerly abundant permanent resident" (Bent 1940:3) and "common in the Carolinas up to 1850" (Sprunt and Chamberlain 1949:292) are rather devoid of substantiating details. Elliott Coues, in the first critical list of South Carolina birds, wrote that the species "appears to have been in former times a common bird: but its occurrence has not been noted of late years" (1869:119). But that, except for the negative second part, is also empty. Even Wayne's ambitious ornithology of the state provided an account that was obscure and lacking in details (1910:10). Bent mentioned the range of the parakeet as formerly including the Pine Barrens and Edding Island (1940:10), but both these attempts to particularize distributions require qualification, as will be shown.

The story of the parakeet in South Carolina begins modestly enough. "T. A., Gent." (supposedly Thomas Ashe, "Gentleman," a ship's clerk — and not a man named "Gent") included a list of birds in a promotional letter written to a friend, as was done by many early English explorers and exploiters. He described in glowing terms the region of "Charlestown," where he lived, probably about 1680-1682: "Birds the Country yields of differing kinds and Colours: For Prey, the Pelican, Hawk, and Eagle, etc. For Pleasure, the red, copped and blew Bird, which wantonly imitates the various Notes and Sounds of such Birds and Beasts which it hears, wherefore, by way of Allusion, it's call'd the mocking Bird; for which pleasing Property it's there esteem'd a Rarity. Duck, Mallard, Widgeon, Teal, Curlew, Plover, Partridge, the Flesh of which is equally as good, tho' smaller than ours in England. Pigeons and Parakeittoes. In Winter huge Flights of wild Turkies, oftentimes weighing from twenty, thirty, to forty pound . . . They have a Bird I believe the least in the whole Creation, named the Humming Bird; in bigness the Wren being much Superior . . . they continue between the Tropiques the whole year round . . . but I am informed, that in the more Northern parts of America they sleep the whole Winter" (Salley 1911:151-152). Although the worthy clerk perhaps got painted buntings ("red, copped and blew") confused with mockingbirds and his typesetter put "In Winter" with turkeys instead of parakeets, he ought not to be ridiculed for believing that various small birds hiber-

nated; many scientists of his day agreed with him. The year 1682, one judges, was a good one for wild turkeys, and the frontier mentality has fervently abided by forty-pound turkeys ever since.

Samuel Wilson, who was probably never in the colonies, seconded the sterling hopes of economic opportunities promoted by T. A., Gent. (and may even have purloined his bird list from that, or a common, source). Putting a Pounds-Shillings-Pence sign on everything that he could, he listed trees, other plants, fruits, mammals and birds found in the Charleston area: "Here are also in the woods great plenty of wilde Turkeys, Partridges, something smaller than those of England, but more de[l]icate, Turtle Doves, Paraquetos, and Pidgeons: On the grass planes the whistling Plover and Cranes and divers sorts of Birds unknowne in England." He also listed a number of waterfowl (1682; Salley 1911:170-171).

John Lawson, as I have already noted, did not mention parakeets in his long trip inland from Charleston in the winter of 1700-1701, suggestive negative evidence that the "Carolina" part of the bird's name was never more than a formality. It remained for his near-contemporary, visiting naturalist Mark Catesby, to put South Carolina's claim to the parakeet firmly on record (1731:11) and, incidentally, to bring it to attention of the scientific world. The latter event came to official fruition through the restless genius of the great Karl von Linné, known to the Latin-mongering elite of that time as Carolus Linnaeus. Linnaeus merely cited the species' homeland as "Carolina" and duly provided it with an enduring specific scientific name that says, in Latin, the same thing (1758:97). He said very little more, for he had not a specimen but only Catesby's plate and account from which to elaborate upon his legitimate binominal for the species. That Catesby referred to South Carolina only needs to be repeated; he did not mean to include North Carolina (Wayne 1917:3; consult also Catesby's places of residence in America: Frick and Stearns 1961). As to the status of the species, Catesby was sketchy and it is not clear whether he meant to imply that the species left Carolina twice a year, in winter and again, as the French naturalist Buffon put it, "in the love season," to reappear later in the season of harvest (Buffon 1792-1793:235-237). (Buffon was often misled by what he called the voice of reason — actually, his own preconceptions — and not only had no qualms about demoting New World forms to poor relations of Old World species, but also held firmly to his decision that parrots only bred in the tropics: hence, the Carolina parrot by simple calculation was but a migrant out of the French tropical colony of Guiana.)

Thomas Pennant, who, like Buffon, had not been in Carolina, wrote at first that "a few are found as far north as *Carolina*." He later amended that view to include Virginia, but considered it mainly a migratory bird even in

Carolina (1773:6; 1792, 1:282). Pennant's contemporary, John Latham, who became a universal genius in ornithology by taking uncritically from all previous authors, threw his net widely: "This bird inhabits Guiana, migrating into *Carolina* and *Virginia* in Autumn." He leaves one a little staggered by citing only Catesby for this monstrous combination (1781-1785:227).

In the midst of all this copying from each other, it is a pleasure to record observations of someone who actually saw a parakeet in "Carolina." The alert Lieutenant Enos Reeves marched southward into South Carolina in April 1782 and left a letter date-lined Congaree, Richland County, South Carolina, 20 April. In it he related intimate details of the back country. The countryside had changed dramatically after Charlotte had been reached and Rowan County, North Carolina, was crossed. His group approached McCord's Ferry on the Congaree River: "Here is the first place that I have come across the Palmetto tree or rather species of it called the Palmetto Royal and Parrots or rather Parroquetts, and I am told, that Alligators are to be found in this River" (1897:475-476).

William Bartram in 1791 offered first of all what everyone already knew or at least said often enough: parakeets "are natives of Carolina and Florida, where they breed and continue the year round." The "year round" part may refer to Florida alone and, more critical in this case, it is uncertain whether he meant to include South Carolina in his generalization, for his longest stays in Carolina were in North Carolina (1958:182, 190-191). In fact, although he seems to have had substantial personal knowledge of parakeets in North Carolina, this whole statement may simply be a bow to the Catesby tradition.

John Davis, an itinerant English tutor, spent autumn and early winter 1799 on the plantation of Thomas Drayton, apparently at Coosawhatchie, Jasper County. He went with his pupil on hunting forays: "we fired in vollies at the flocks of doves that frequent the corn fields; sometimes we discharged our pieces at the wild geese, whose empty cackling betrayed them; and once we brought down some paroquets that were directing their course over our heads to Georgia" (1909:91).

Robert Mills, an early historian of the state, included the "perroquet" in his statewide list, which included about 93 species; in county by county enumerations of birds that frequently repetitively included passenger pigeons, the only county specifically listed as having the "parroquet," as he spelled it the second time, was Beaufort County (1826:101,378).

Garrulous John James Audubon must also be cited. His genius for burying good observation amidst verbiage and glittering generality again asserted itself. In Volume II of his *Ornithological Biography* he told of keeping a couple of young black vultures in a coop in the yard, giving them "a

great number of Red-headed Woodpeckers and Parokeets, birds then easy to procure, as they were feeding daily on the mulberry trees in the immediate neighbourhood of my orphans" (1834:35). The area no doubt was Charleston, at the home of the Reverend John Bachman. An Audubon letter of 24 December 1833 mentions that vultures eat freshly killed birds and that this was the second experiment of this sort, being a repetition of what he, Audubon, had performed before (Herrick 1917, 2:55). Audubon had been at Bachman's place several times, but various circumstances indicate that the above events must have occurred during the visit that ended with his leaving Charleston in early June 1832, after he had spent the spring there. Both young black vultures and ripe mulberries would have been available in South Carolina before his departure. I am confident that this is a good South Carolina record of the parakeet and, despite its involved nature, perhaps more trustworthy than some claims, where literary effect or promotional advantage may be suspected.

Audubon's record is in fact the kind of first-hand, unstudied and spontaneous evidence so sadly lacking in the history of the parakeet (even in Audubon's own formal accounts). Memories are notoriously unreliable and yet end up being much of what little we have. Memories also become encrusted with information from sources quite removed from the original observations, if any. Samuel Scoville, Jr., an amateur ornithologist, visited South Carolina in May 1937. Conversation turned to parakeets (then alleged to be abroad in the state, as will be described later), and a landscape artist in Charleston related that his grandfather, born in the late 1830s, "used to tell of running out into his mother's garden in Charleston, when he was a little boy, to scare away the paroquets from the orange trees. Every year, too, he would ride over to Virginia Springs on his pony, while the rest of the family went in the family carriage, and on the way he would frequently see 'conures' — the Carolinian name for paroquets" (1940:560). The story may be true in the main; its date of around the 1840s seems acceptable, but I doubt seriously if Americans of that time would have called parakeets by the later pet-store name of "conure."

Scoville's date of around 1840 agrees with the memories of George Twiggs. He "was greatly interested in birds and . . . spent his boyhood on plantations in Aiken (South Carolina) and Richmond (Georgia) counties, and . . . died at the age of eighty in 1930." He "never observed this species . . . but . . . his father told him that they were not uncommon in Aiken County during his young manhood, about 1840" (Murphey 1937:24).

These memories place the species as present more or less into the

1840s. Plantation owner J. Motte Alston declared, however, that it had disappeared from the Santee River area (probably Georgetown County) "before my day" — he was born in 1821. His grandmother recalled large flocks of them, probably around 1780 (1953: 13). This dramatically uneven pattern of distribution, with vague allegations of previous abundance, seems to typify the parakeet over much, perhaps most, of its range. Any popular conjuration of it as a rival of the passenger pigeon's millions must be rejected out of hand.

Broome's attribution of breeding, year-round status to the parakeet in South Carolina was probably uncritical (1837:65). That in the hack historical work by Simms certainly was (1843:13). Ramsay's history considered the "perroquet" as permanent resident (1809, 2:185), as uninformative a remark as that of Professor Gibbes (1848:vi) who prepared a list that has been widely cited but which seems to have come straight out of Audubon's check-list of American birds (1839:189), even preserving Audubon's generic howler of *Centurus* for the parakeet.

A more reliable sounding record, on the other hand, has come down from Albert Twiggs, who had a long continued interest in natural history. As a 17-year old soldier "in the Confederate Army attempting unsuccessfully to stem Sherman's march from Savannah to Beaufort and Charleston . . . he had seen a number of flocks of paroquets on the Combahee River and in the pine woods between Yemassee and the coast, on numerous occasions" (Murphey 1937:24). The time of this observation can be calculated as late autumn 1864 and the place extreme southern South Carolina. It seems to be one of the last observations upon the species as a probably continuous resident in South Carolina, all other reports being at widely spaced intervals.

One of these later, perhaps accidental, appearances has been described for me by Jay Shuler (letter 1961). Dr. Eddie McClellan, an intelligent and interested observer, had recalled that a parakeet appeared after a big storm in 1885 and was killed with a slingshot in McClellansville, Charleston County. Since the species still existed in considerable numbers in parts of Florida at that time, such an occurrence is quite possible. But, it is also clear that there were no contemporary reports of parakeets in the South Carolina area. Witness Walter Hoxie's suggestion that "Parrot Ridge" on Edding Island, near Frogmore, Beaufort County, was "a name which designates many localities hereabouts and was doubtless bestowed by the early settlers when the gaudy Parrakeets flocked in this region" (1886). Hoxie was a talented and experienced ornithologist and he certainly had no first-hand knowledge of parakeets in South Carolina. His passing comment, more etymology than ornithology to begin with, was a poor reed for Bent to have leaned on in naming Edding Island a

former locality for the species in the state. No one seems to have documented Hoxie's claim that "many localities hereabouts" have the term "parrot" or "parakeet" in their names, and I cannot even precisely place his "Parrot Ridge."

Leverett M. Loomis, a careful student of ornithological history, turned up no surprises in his history of certain South Carolina birds, but perhaps was somewhat wide of the mark to place "the time of the disappearance of the Paroquet from our local fauna" as about 1826 (1886). But, his caution was commendable alongside the error of Hasbrouck (1891:374) who indicated that Waldo Irving Burnett listed the parakeet as present in the "pine barrens" in 1851. That unfortunate misfiring was heard round the world. Wayne (1910), Ridgway (1916), Pearson et al. (1919) and, as mentioned, Bent all allude to parakeets in the pine barrens, if not Burnett by name. Burnett's paper "On the fauna of the Pine Barrens of upper South Carolina" did indeed appear, as everybody's bibliography says, in 1851. It is a list of species observed, "with a few words on the 'conformability of individuals of the Fauna to each other' — whatever they may be," as Elliott Coues put it (1878:637). However, there is no reference to the Carolina parakeet in it.

The general failure of observers to leave definite records might justly be called Footnote Number One to the tragedy of the parakeet in South Carolina. Footnote Number Two came later. Paul M. Rea remarked editorially in 1919: "Tradition says that many years ago nearly a dozen Carolina Parrakeets were destroyed because they were not in sufficiently good condition to be exhibited. Some of these specimens undoubtedly lived in South Carolina. The Parrakeet is now almost extinct and it is not known that a single specimen from this state is in existence" (1919:7). "Tradition says" was no doubt just a polite way to avoid naming names and exposing someone to ridicule for the rashness of his action.

SOUTH CAROLINA: THE PRESENT CENTURY

Footnote Number Three to the parakeet in South Carolina may or may not have been a tragedy, for it may be that parakeets were not involved. Many real or alleged sightings of the Carolina parakeet have come in over the years. Nearly all such claims from the 1930s and 1940s, interestingly enough, were from South Carolina. It is from there, of course, that there came what, from sheer bulk of documentation, must remain the Gran'daddy of all "rediscoveries" of the parakeet. First, let me review summarily the body of published matter.

It all began when George M. Melamphy, working on a wild turkey project in the Santee Swamp, Georgetown County, talked to Alexander Sprunt, Jr., in 1933-1934, and reported several times seeing parakeets and

ivory-billed woodpeckers. The sighting of the latter rare species was finally fully substantiated, although the good news came to naught and the species could not be saved in that area. Sprunt and Chamberlain, in their study of South Carolina birds (1949: 292-293), later summarized the situation and the two authors fell neatly into two positions in the parliamentary arena, with Sprunt stoutly arguing for the Ayes.

In spite of, as will be seen, some equivocation by Robert P. Allen at the time (evident from Audubon Society records), his considered opinion in 1949 was that he had not seen parakeets (*op. cit.*: 294). Roger Tory Peterson also later confidently rejected the whole claim (1948:204, 207).

The contemporary published record is skimpy. John H. Baker, president of Sprunt and Allen's parent organization, the National Audubon Society, reported in *Bird-Lore* (1938) that there were no observations sufficiently definite to be considered scientific, although investigations would continue. The official pronouncement of the influential American Ornithologists' Union Protection Committee (1939) was negative. On the other hand, Samuel Scoville, Jr., an amateur bird-watcher, visited the Santee with some other people in May 1937 and managed to catch sight of a swiftly flying bird that appeared to him to be green in color (1940:564).

Although convinced that he had seen a parakeet, it was personal conviction alone for Scoville. *Time* magazine put it much more forcefully in a sensationalist note in 1941: "The Carolina parakeet . . . last reported seen in 1904 and long thought extinct, is not. Last week an official of the National Audubon Society confessed that a Charleston ornithologist has been watching parakeets in the Santee River swamps for five years." Actually, not many Audubon officials would have wanted their names associated with such a "confession" by that time. Revisionary hindsight, as has been shown above, even further eroded this ebullient pronouncement.

The ghost of the Santee parakeets, however, has not remained laid. George Laycock, field editor of *Audubon* (the modern name of *Bird-Lore*), has blown new life into the old drama of Santee Swamp, and thinks a negative conclusion less than scientifically proved (1969). No uncritical sensationalist, Laycock had just proved that even in zoos where the public record ought to have been straight from the beginning the parakeet lived three years longer than all the official textbooks said. The orthodox had their dates thoroughly mixed up, with misinformation from several sources congealing into the received version. As an example of how incorrect details accrue to an already dubious but popular conclusion, one report even had it that the region where the birds were allegedly sighted "has since been destroyed by a power project" (Greenway 1967:322) —

which is not quite the case, since the dams and reservoirs are considerably upstream from the area in question.

In discounting the discounters, Laycock convinced himself that there was some fire amidst all the smoke of the decade of the 1930s. Through the kindness of Les Line, editor of *Audubon*, I have read the very considerable amount of smoke generated in those faraway times. In the following review, I plan to quote from the Audubon Society archives only when some commentary upon the earlier published record or the good account by Laycock seems called for. Any apparent brusqueness is in the interest of brevity. The decision is still open and I leave the reader to his instincts.

George Melamphy, dismissed acidly by world famous ornithologist Ludlow Griscom as "not a bird student," did have some knowledge of wild turkeys and I can see no particular reason for him to mislead anyone in regard to other birds. Besides, he did apparently correctly alert Sprunt and others to the presence of ivory-billed woodpeckers. The preliminary report by Sprunt on 10 April 1935, relating definite but undated Melamphy sightings, described the region in question, some 25 miles above the delta of the Santee River, as "a tract of unbroken wilderness and absolutely virgin timber." His enthusiasm was probably justified, but Audubon official Lester L. Walsh on 24 December 1937 (after the chilling Griscom episode, to be recounted shortly) was more restrained in his analysis: "Lest any misapprehension exist relative to the extent of virgin timber let me say that most of the cypress and gum in the region gives indications of having been cut at one time or another." There were, however, unlumbered patches of small extent and some places judged adequate habitat for parakeets.

A "Cracker" (Sprunt's term) named W. F. "Red" Welch, who took on the very part-time job of warden for a section of the Santee tract over which the Audubon Society was able to gain slight control, also reported seeing a parakeet, but he may have been shoring up his job. He submitted a couple of feathers which looked interesting enough to Allen that he sent them to Alexander Wetmore of the U. S. National Museum for identification. Wetmore reported them to be meadowlark feathers.

Another local man, Warren J. Shokes (described as a man of "simple honesty" by Sprunt but who struck Griscom as "quite capable of bare fabrication") became official warden on 1 February 1936. He reported seeing a parakeet, with adult coloring, on 17 February. By the end of December he had reported five sightings of the parakeet, and on Christmas Day his son, Hollie, saw what Sprunt recorded as "a beautiful adult Carolina Paroquet." Hollie thought the bird had a rather darker band around the base of the neck than was shown in the picture given

him. By then, in their report for the period 26 November to 12 December 1936, both Sprunt and Allen had pretty much put their stamp of approval upon the notion that there were parakeets present. Despite Allen's later recantation, consider this: "From the details of these and previous observations and the established nature of the evening flyway we have no hesitation in identifying these birds as Carolina Paroquets (Conuropsis c. carolinensis)." It is perhaps not surprising that, in the face of such persnickity taxonomic overkill, talented and experienced Griscom should have emphasized that "neither gentleman had had any previous experience with wild parrots at any time or place."

Things slowed down in 1937. There was a February report of a parakeet from the elder Shokes but nothing else until 11 September when one was sighted. Shokes, with what seems to me a suspicious haggling over irrelevant — or spurious — details, insisted that there was some "'speckling'" around the shoulders of the latter bird, although agreeing otherwise that it was adult.

This time of lull was fated to coincide with the visit of top brass. Griscom and others descended in the period 7 to 16 December, during a stretch of bad weather. Griscom obviously was in a no-nonsense mood which, as a dean of American field ornithologists, he had some right to be. He pronounced it "most improbable that these birds were Carolina Paroquets; that they were more likely to be Parrots of other species that had escaped from captivity or been released." (It might have been questioned whether they were parrots at all.) Anyway, Griscom was concerned for the good name of the Society, should all that leak to the press, and he also wanted to keep investigations alive on the slim chance that something might turn up.

Some of Griscom's opinions of various people involved have been cited. It ought to be said that he considered the younger Shokes, Hollie, "a thoroughly honest and attractive fellow," although pretty largely lacking in critical capacities to make ornithological decisions. To exemplify his estimation Griscom pointedly noted that Hollie's sighting of what Sprunt had accepted as "a beautiful adult Carolina Paroquet" had, under grilling, become "a strange looking bird unlike anything he had ever seen before; that it was generally 'bluish in color with a yellow topknot,' and was apparently catching insects on the bank of the creek." Griscom suggested that "flight-lines" would not be held to by the birds over any very long period of time; that parrots were not usually late in going to roost (he might have pointed out that mourning doves, so like parakeets in size and perhaps even in pattern of flight, frequently careen about quite late); and that, even though he could be wrong about the Carolina parakeet, which he had never seen, parrots usually called and chattered loudly

when flying to feeding and roosting stations.

Evidently Hollie had failed to produce any birds on another visit by Sprunt in March 1938 (correspondence is missing). He did, allegedly with some reluctance, report to Sprunt in mid-November that he had seen parakeets in early June: two adults and what was presumably a young one "being taught to fly." The adults were reported to have raised quite a chatter. Sprunt thought this significant, for Hollie was "rather deaf, and . . . the noise made by the birds must have been considerable for him to hear it." Hollie had seen a lone adult — "One of those same birds" — on the first of September. He had reported neither incident to Sprunt spontaneously, not wanting to "stir up things again.'" By that time, however, the Shokeses were not in Audubon hire, the Santee Sanctuary had been discontinued, and Hollie was anxious to have employment.

What it all adds up to is difficult to calculate, but I find it hard to share Laycock's conclusion with enthusiasm. On the other hand, in the years since 1940 various reports of surviving parakeets have come to Sprunt and others. Nothing worthwhile ever evolved from any of them. It must be said, however, that nobody investigates them wholeheartedly — such reports are now filed (or referred) and forgotten. It is as if the hot potatoes and burned fingers of one generation deter those who come later from taking a chance.

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